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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

March 2010

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The March luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, March 18, 2010, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker will be Father Walt Bracken, SVD, who will speak on the history of Saint Augustine Seminary. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call **by noon on Wednesday, March 17**, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-five people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.

Because of increased expenses associated with the monthly luncheon, the Board of Directors has voted to increase the price of lunch to \$10.00 per person.

## MEMBERSHIP DUES

It's time to send in your membership dues for 2010. If you are unsure about whether your fees are due, check the date on your address label. This date is your expiration date. Prices are fifteen dollars (\$15) for an individual and twenty-five (\$25) for a household.

Thank you to all members who have sent in your dues. If you have sent them in and the date on the label has not been changed, please call the society at 467-4090 so that we can correct our mistake.



Nanih Waiya mound, the legendary birthplace of the Choctaw Nation

## Mississippi's Native Population Before the Europeans Came

Edited by  
Eddie Coleman

At one time a greater variety of tribes and a heavier Native American population lived in Mississippi than in any other state in the Southeast. At the time of the European intrusion, tribes included the Acolapissa, Bayougoula, Biloxi, and Pascagoula on the Gulf and the Natchez on the lower Mississippi River. On the Yazoo River and its tributaries were

found the Chackchiuma, Coula, Houma, Ibitoupa, Karoa, Taposa, Tiou, and Yazoo. The Choctaws occupied the center and south of the present state, and the Chickasaws, the north and northeast.

The culture of the Mississippi tribes was similar with the most significant differences in language. The most populous tribes, the Choctaws with about twenty thousand tribesmen and the Chickasaws and Natchez each numbering about forty-five hundred, had a common language heritage in Muskogean. The Biloxi spoke a Siouian dialect. Early Europeans described Muskogean as "very agreeable to the ear, courteous, gentle and musical...the women in particular so



## THE

**HISTORIAN**

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
Pat Fuchs, PublisherPublished monthly by the  
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Marianne Pluim, Webmaster**LOBRANO HOUSE  
HOURS**MONDAY — FRIDAY  
10:00AM — 3:00PM  
Closed: 12:00—1:00 (lunch)**MISSION STATEMENT**

“TO PRESERVE THE GENERAL AND ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY OF HANCOCK COUNTY AND TO PRESERVE THE KATE LOBRANO HOUSE AND COLLECTIONS THEREIN; TO RESEARCH AND INTERPRET LIFE IN HANCOCK COUNTY; AND TO ENCOURAGE AN APPRECIATION OF AND INTEREST IN HISTORICAL PRESERVATION.”

fine and musical as to represent the singing of birds.” No Mississippi tribe had a written language.

**Folklore and Religion**

The rich folklore of the tribes included a creation epic, an account of a migration from the “setting sun” to the “land of the great river,” and the epic of a flood in which people and wild creatures escaped on rafts.

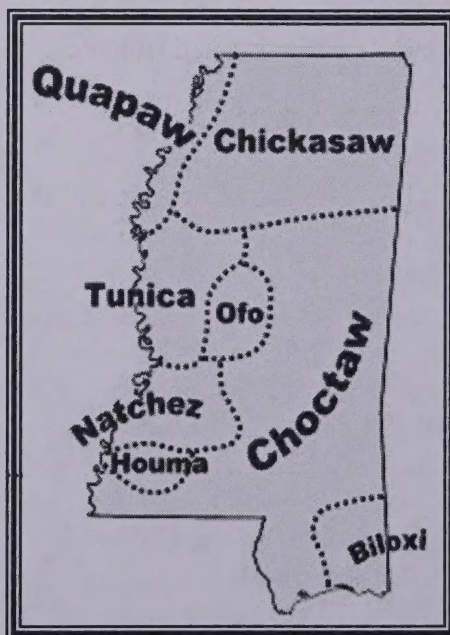
Tribal religions explained life processes—birth, puberty, maturation, and death. Each one included a belief in a supreme being who, through his agents, created humankind and things. The sun was the most important part of the deity force. The Great Holy Fire above was represented in each town by a sacred fire watched over by guardian priests. These priests dispensed coals for household fires, thus keeping the supreme tribal god in each home. The Indians also believed that lesser

gods and spirits inhabited the environment and were sources of good and evil. Some spirits helped people in their work and hunting while others assisted tribal healers in bringing health and long life to the members. Other spirits were evil; they took various forms and confused people, causing personal misfortune and illness.

As the tribes had elaborate rituals for life so did they have them for death. The Choctaws placed each corpse on a scaffold. At the appropriate time, a class of citizens called bone pickers cleaned the flesh from the bones, performed appropriate rituals, and buried the remains, all with much lamentation and wailing. The Natchez funeral, especially if it were for a tribal leader, might involve the sacrifice of wives and followers, their spirits accompanying the departed into the promised land. The Chickasaws buried their dead in the floor of the household of the deceased. The corpse was interred in a sitting position facing west so that his spirit would find its way to the land of the hereafter. A special class of mourners, all women, wailed daily over the grave for a year.

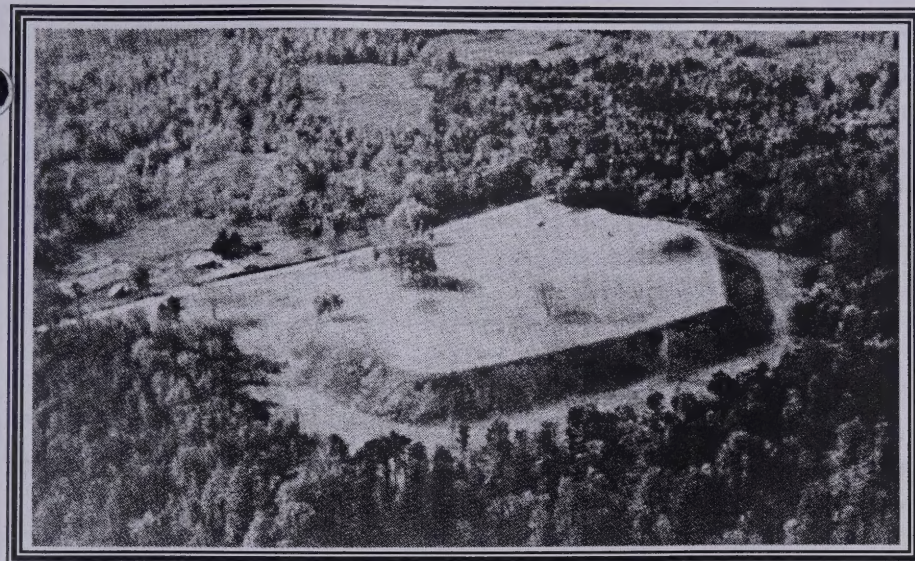
**Social Organization**

The Mississippi tribes followed the clan system of social organization with each tribe divided into two halves and each of these divisions divided into clans. Members were required to marry outside their clans. Descent was maternal, traced



Location of Native American tribes in Mississippi





Emerald Mound, the second largest Indian temple mound in the United States, was used by the ancestors of the Natchez Indians.

through the female line. The principal clan in each division provided the political and religious leaders for their tribe.

The tribes were town dwellers with each town governed by a council of clan elders. The towns were confederated into a nation with a national council and principal chief or chiefs. Most matters were settled at the town level of government while the principal function of the national government was promoting the general welfare and protecting the common interests of the nation. The Choctaws used a system in which national power was shared by three principal chiefs, each representing a geographical segment of the nation. Most tribesmen enjoyed a wide latitude of freedom and individual expression except among the Natchez whose despotic government was based on a caste system headed by a tyrannical chief and privileged class supported by the mass of serf-like subjects bearing tribute to the ruling caste.

All land was held in common with ownership vested in the tribe, its members having right of occupancy. Major crimes under tribal law were homicide, blasphemy, theft, and adultery with the clan council of elders passing judgment. In homicide cases, the victim's relatives were expected to find and kill the murderer or substitute his brother if they were unable to find the real culprit. Other crimes were punished by public whipping and ridicule.

### The Economy

Before the coming of the Europeans, food, shelter, clothing, and other simple needs were met by hunting and gathering, agriculture, commerce with other tribes, and plunder from war. The tribesmen felled large sycamore and cottonwood trees, hollowed the trunks by fire, and scraped the charred insides with clam shells or sharpened stones to fashion river boats. Pines provided lumber for house

frames and pitch torches for night lights. Cane served for weaving baskets and mats, fish traps, seines, and fences. Warriors used hollow cane stalks as blow guns. Hickory was used for heavy containers and siding of the winter house as well as mortar sets for grinding grain. Hickory and black locust were favored woods for bows and arrows.

While the Mississippi tribes obtained basic foods from nature (deer, bear, and fish), they were primarily agricultural with corn as their main crop. Between the grain hills, the farmers planted melons, pumpkins, sunflowers, beans, peas, and tobacco. From the earth they gathered clay for cooking and storage utensils.

The economic life of the Mississippi Indians was enriched through commerce with other tribes. They traded deer skins and bear oil for special materials used to develop tools and to fashion hunting and war implements. They also traded for conch shells adapted for ceremonial chalices and sheet copper used for ornaments. A popular trade item was the Indian slave, captured in intertribal wars. To prevent escape, slave holders mutilated their slaves' feet by cutting nerves or sinews just above the instep, enabling them to labor but not flee.

Through the centuries the Mississippi tribes had developed a self-contained, satisfying lifestyle sufficient for their social, economic, and spiritual needs. The European intrusion, beginning in the middle of the six-



teenth century, provoked dramatic changes and ultimately destroyed this aboriginal lifestyle.

## SOURCE:

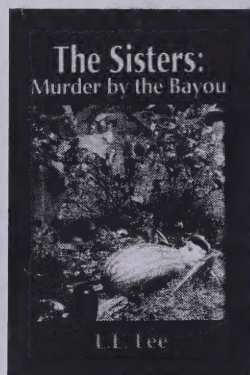
Gibson, Arrell M. "The Indians of Mississippi" in *A History of Mississippi*, Vol. 1, ed. Richard Aubrey McLemore. Jackson: University and College Press of Mississippi, 1973.

## Hancock County Historical Society Receives Recognition

The Hancock County Historical Society recently was awarded the Frank E. Everett, Jr., Award presented by the Mississippi Historical Society. This award is presented periodically as merited to a local historical soci-

ety that has made an outstanding contribution to the preservation and interpretation of Mississippi history. The formal announcement of the award was made on Saturday, March 6, at the Awards Brunch of the annual meeting of the Mississippi Historical Society held at Gulfport. Charles Gray, Executive Director of the Hancock County Historical Society, accepted the award on behalf of the organization.

In addition to accepting the award for the Society, Charles was also a featured speaker at the meeting and spoke on the history of the Hancock County Historical Society.



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## BOOKS FOR SALE AT LOBRANO HOUSE

*Bay Saint Louis: Celebrating the First 300 Years*  
By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A nostalgic keepsake of the city's history including descriptions and pictures of many of the historic buildings and houses especially those along Beach Boulevard prior to Katrina

*Blueberry Peaches, Red Robin Pie*

By Stella LaViolette

and Paul Estronza La Violette (\$25.00)

An annotated cookbook of Gulf Coast recipes

*Heritage Cookbook*

By the HCHS (\$15.00)

A collection of our members' favorite family recipes

*Holly*

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

An intriguing anthology of tales of a tomat living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

*Katrina Cookbook*

By Charlet Russell (\$19.95)

A collection of recipes by Bayou Tours

*One Dog, Two Dogs, Three Dogs, Four...*

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

Twice told tales of several dogs living in a beach house on the Gulf Coast

*Scrapbook of Treasured Memories*

By Connie Heitzmann and Betty Stechmann (\$20.00)

A book of art, photography, and reminiscence of the Gulf Coast

*Sink or Be Sunk*

By Paul La Violette (\$30.00)

A recounting of the naval battle in the Mississippi Sound preceding the Battle of New Orleans in 1812

*Vintage Photographs of Hancock County*

By

Lori Gordon

(\$15.00)

These photographs come from the vast photographic collection of the Historical Society. They have been restored and matted by local artist Lori Gordon.

*West Side Stories*

*Before, During, and After on Mississippi's West Coast*

Photographs and Commentary by

Vicki Niolet and Betty Stechmann (\$28.00)

A Pictorial of our homes and communities in Pass Christian, Bay St. Louis, Waveland, Lakeshore, and Clermont Harbor

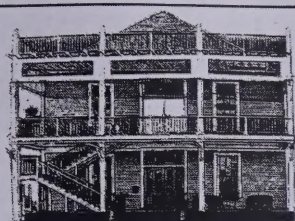
*A White Egret in the Shallows*

By Paul La Violette (\$20.00)

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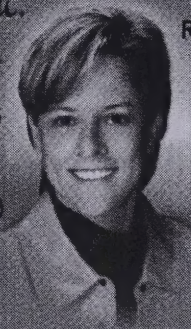
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# COMING EVENTS

Sat., March 13: "Souper Mud Fest"

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Sat., March 13: local attorney, Chris Johnson will sign copies of his book *Destiny*

While visiting, enjoy the work of the seatweaving students of Jo Rusin and the music of folk musician Becka Clark.

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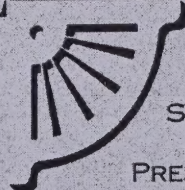
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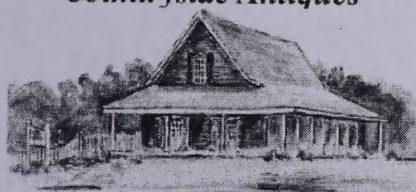
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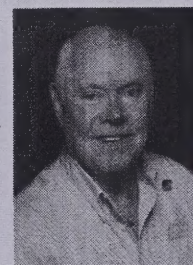
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